

Message Text

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PAGE 01 STATE 086008

62

ORIGIN EA-14

INFO OCT-01 EUR-25 ISO-00 IO-14 DPW-01 AID-20 OMB-01

CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-07

PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01 SP-03 SS-20 USIA-15 /150 R

DRAFTED BY EA/VN:JDFINNEY:JCM

APPROVED BY EA/VN:RHWENZEL

EUR/WE:MJHABIB

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P 262135Z APR 74

FM SECSTATE WASHDC

TO AMEMBASSY SAIGON PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY PARIS

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINS, VS, FR

SUBJECT: ALLEGED IMPRISONMENT OF BUDDHIST MONKS

REFS: A. SAIGON 5461; B. STATE 84428

1. FULL TEXT OF THICH NHAT HANH LETTER, WITH
ACCOMPANYING STATEMENT FROM THICH MINH HOANG, FOLLOWS:

BEGIN TEXT A.

THE VIETNAMESE BUDDHIST PEACE DELEGATION,
PARIS, FRANCE, MARCH 15, 1974.

DEAR FRIENDS: ON THE MORNING OF MARCH 1, 1974, 300
BUDDHIST MONKS DETAINED AT CHI HOA DETENTION CENTER IN
SAIGON BEGAN FASTING AND PRAYING IN SILENCE TO DEMAND
THEIR RELEASE. IN A LETTER SENT TO THICH PHAP LAN,
CHAIRMAN OF THE BUDDHIST COMMITTEE FOR THE RELEASE OF
POLITICAL PRISONERS, WRITTEN ON MARCH 5, 1974, THE MONK
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PAGE 02 STATE 086008

THICH MINH HOANG, REPRESENTATIVE OF THE 300 FASTING

MONKS, SAID THAT 20 OF THEM HAD FAINTED ON THAT DAY AND 5 HAD BEEN CARRIED TO THE PRISON MEDICAL CENTER. HE SAID THAT THE MONKS ARE ONLY LIVING ON PRAYER AND WATER, AND HAVE DECIDED TO GO ON WITH THE FASTINGS AND SILENT PRAYING, INDEFINITELY UNTIL THEIR DEMAND IS MET. HE SAID

ON THAT DAY A TEAM OF OPPOSITION SENATORS CAME TO THE PRISON, BUT THE FASTING MONKS WERE NOT ALLOWED TO TALK TO THEM.

ON MARCH 12, THICH PHAP LAN, THICH NHAT THUONG AND 20 OTHER BUDDHIST LEADERS CAME TO THE CHI HOA PRISON TO VISIT THE FASTING MONKS. SEVERAL NEWSMEN CAME WITH THEM. THEY WERE NOT ALLOWED TO ENTER THE PRISON. FILMS AND TAPES OF CBS AND NBC NEWSMEN WERE CONFISCATED. WHEN THE BUDDHIST DELEGATION LEFT, 15 NEWSMEN WERE DETAINED BY THE POLICE. THE DELEGATION RETURNED TO THE PRISON LATER AND TRIED TO PUSH THROUGH THE GATE BUT WERE CHASED OFF BY POLICE WHO FIRED SHOTS INTO THE AIR. EFFORTS BY THE BUDDHIST DELEGATION TO GET SUGAR AND LEMON TO THE FASTING PRISONERS ALSO FAILED. THE GUARDS OF THE PRISON REFUSED TO TAKE THESE ITEMS. ON THE SAME DAY, THE ASSOCIATED PRESS REPORTED THAT 142 MORE MONKS WERE ARRESTED IN CAN GIUOC, 12 MILES SOUTH OF SAIGON.

WE ENCLOSE THE TRANSLATION OF THE LETTER OF PRISONER THICH MINH HOANG TO THICH PHAP LAN AND A PHOTOCOPY OF THE ORIGINAL. WE URGE YOU TO TAKE WHATEVER ACTION YOU CAN TO SUPPORT THE FASTING PRISONERS. WE WILL BE VERY GRATEFUL FOR YOUR SUPPORT.

THICH NHAT HANH. END TEXT.

BEGIN TEXT B.

(TRANSLATED FROM THE VIETNAMESE)

HOMAGE TO OUR LORD AND TEACHER THE ENLIGHTENED
SAKYA MUNI

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PAGE 03 STATE 086008

OUR DEAR VENERABLE: IN THE NAME OF 300 MONKS WHO STARTED LAST WEEK FASTING AND PRAYING IN SILENCE IN THIS DETENTION CENTER IN SAIGON, IMPRISONED ON CHARGES OF CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE AND INSUBORDINATION, WE REQUEST YOU TO RAISE YOUR VOICE SO THAT THE PUBLIC WITHIN AND WITHOUT THE COUNTRY WILL BE AWARE OF WHAT IS GOING ON HERE.

VENERABLE, ALL OF US DECLARED THAT WE WOULD BEGIN ON

THE 27TH OF FEBRUARY 1974 FASTING AND PRAYING IN COMPLETE SILENCE TO TRANSMIT OUR REQUEST TO THE GOVERNMENT, ASKING THE GOVERNMENT TO FREE US SO WE CAN GO BACK TO OUR MONASTERIES, PAGODAS, AND INSTITUTES TO CONTINUE OUR RELIGIOUS STUDY AND PRACTICE. ON THAT DAY THE LIEUTENANT COLONEL CHIEF OF THE DETENTION CENTER ASKED US TO

POSTPONE OUR ACTION FOR 3 DAYS, SO THAT HE COULD INTERVENE WITH THE MINISTRY OF THE INTERIOR. HE SAID THAT IF THE RESULT WAS NEGATIVE HE WOULD NOT PREVENT US FROM THE ACTION. WE COMPLIED WITH HIS REQUEST, AND THE RESULT WAS THAT WE STARTED THE FAST AND SILENT PRAYER ON THE MORNING OF MARCH 1, 1974. TODAY, AFTER 5 DAYS LIVING EXCLUSIVELY ON PRAYER AND WATER, MOST OF US FEEL PHYSICALLY EXHAUSTED. MORE THAN 20 HAVE FAINTED AND 5 AMONG THEM HAVE JUST BEEN CARRIED TO THE MEDICAL CENTER OF THIS DETENTION HOUSE.

TODAY WE NOTICE THAT THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE DETENTION CENTER IS TRYING TO HIDE OUR ACTION FROM THE PUBLIC. AT 9:30 THIS MORNING WHEN A DELEGATION OF SENATORS CAME TO INVESTIGATE THE ASPIRATION OF THE PRISONERS, THE ADMINISTRATION PREVENTED US TO MEET WITH THE DELEGATION. IT IS OUR INTENTION TO PURSUE OUR ACTION OF FASTING AND PRAYING IN COMPLETE SILENCE NOT ONLY FOR 7 DAYS AS WE DECIDED AT THE BUREAU OF THE LIEUTENANT COLONEL CHIEF OF THE DETENTION CENTER ON THE 4TH OF MARCH 1974, BUT INDEFINITELY UNTIL OUR ASPIRATION IS MET.

FOR THE SAKE OF THE LIVES OF 300 OF US, WE RESPECTFULLY REQUEST YOU, VENERABLE, TO PRESENT THIS CASE TO THE CENTRAL EXECUTIVE COUNCIL OF THE UNIFIED LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PAGE 04 STATE 086008

BUDDHIST CHURCH, AND ASK THE COUNCIL TO INTERVENE WITH THE GOVERNMENT TO SAVE US FROM SLOWLY DYING IN THIS PRISON.

ALSO WE REQUEST THAT YOU AND THE CENTRAL EXECUTIVE COUNCIL OF THE UNIFIED BUDDHIST CHURCH PRESENT OUR CASE WIDELY TO THE PUBLIC. WE SHALL BE GRATEFUL TO YOU FOR OUR WHOLE LIFE AND WE PRAY THAT OUR LORD AND TEACHER WILL BRING YOU PEACE AND THE FULL ACCOMPLISHMENT OF YOUR TASK.

RESPECTFULLY, THICH MINH HOANG,
PRISON NO. 5848 QPTA, FOR THE REPRESENTATIVE COMMITTEE
OF THE FASTING 300. END TEXT.

2. WE HAVE NOTED IN PREVIOUS CONGRESSIONAL INQUIRIES

GENERATED BY THICH NHAT HANH THAT HE HAS CITED "BUDDHIST COMMITTEE FOR THE RELEASE OF POLITICAL PRISONERS" AS SOURCE OF SOME OF HIS INFORMATION. ALSO BASED ON PREVIOUS LETTER IT APPEARS THAT "VIETNAMESE BUDDHIST PEACE DELEGATION" HAS CLOSE RELATIONSHIP WITH FELLOWSHIP OF RECONCILIATION (FOR), HEADQUARTERED IN NYACK, N. Y. FOR IDENTIFIES ITSELF AS AN ORGANIZATION DEDICATED TO

PROMOTING PEACE AND BROTHERHOOD THROUGHOUT WORLD AND HAS BEEN A REGULAR CRITIC OF U.S. POLICY IN INDOCHINA. FOR APPEARS ON LIST OF ORGANIZATIONS IN INDOCHINA RESOURCE CENTER PUBLICATIONS WHO ARE DESCRIBED AS "NATIONAL PEACE AND SOCIAL ACTION ORGANIZATIONS (THAT) HAVE MADE THE SITUATION OF THEIUS POLITICAL PRISONERS A PRIORITY CONCERN." RECENT EDITION OF FOR MAGAZINE REPORTS THAT FOR STAFFERS HAVE VISITED HANH IN PARIS TO ASSIST HIM WITH HIS ACTIVITIES.

3. LATEST ADDRESS (OCTOBER 1973) WE HAVE FOR "VIETNAMESE BUDDHIST PEACE DELEGATION" IS 69 BOULEVARD DESGRANGER 92330 - SCEAUX, FRANCE; TEL. (PARIS) 702.67.33.

4. GVN EMBASSY IS AWARE OF NEW WRINKLE IN ANTI-AID CAMPAIGN AND REPORTS THAT SAIGON OFFICIALS ARE TRYING TO GET BUDDHIST INSTITUTE OF SECULAR AFFAIRS (VIEN HOA DAO) LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PAGE 05 STATE 086008

TO ISSUE PUBLIC STATEMENT DISASSOCIATING ITSELF FROM NHAT HANH AND PHAP LAN WHO ARE STYLING THEMSELVES AS UNIFIED BUDDHIST CHURCH SPOKESMAN.

5. FOR PARIS: REFTELS BEING REPEATED TO YOU. WOULD APPRECIATE SOONEST YOUR COMMENTS ON CURRENT ACTIVITIES ON NHAT HANH AND HIS "PEACE DELEGATION." KISSINGER

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptoning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: PENAL SYSTEM, PUBLIC DEMONSTRATIONS, BUDDHISTS, ARRESTS, CHURCH STATE RELATIONS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 26 APR 1974
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: GolinoFR
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1974STATE086008
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: JDFINNEY:JCM
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D740100-0038
From: STATE
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1974/newtext/t1974049/aaaaahyw.tel
Line Count: 208
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ORIGIN EA
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 4
Previous Channel Indicators:
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: A. SAIGON 5461; B. STATE 84428
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: GolinoFR
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 23 APR 2002
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <23 APR 2002 by boyleja>; APPROVED <14 FEB 2003 by GolinoFR>
Review Markings:

Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
30 JUN 2005

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: ALLEGED IMPRISONMENT OF BUDDHIST MONKS
TAGS: PINS, VS, FR
To: SAIGON PARIS
Type: TE
Markings: Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 30 JUN 2005